

# Exploring Character and Characterization

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Character** is perhaps the most important of all the elements of the short story. Almost invariably, it is the people in stories that interest us most.

## UNDERSTANDING CHARACTERS

Characters are defined by the qualities that make them think, feel, and act in certain ways. To understand each character completely, try looking at him or her from different angles:

- ✓ • **Values** What people, places, or things are most important in the character's life? What does he or she value most?
- ✓ • **Feelings** What emotions does the character feel most strongly? (Anger? Fear? Love? Hate? . . .)
- ✓ • **Goals** What are the character's greatest hopes? What is he or she working to accomplish?
- ✓ • **Problems** What other characters or circumstances are keeping the character from achieving his or her goals?

## TECHNIQUES OF CHARACTERIZATION

**Characterization** involves the various methods used by authors to communicate their characters to the reader.

**Direct characterization** The author *tells* the reader information about characters directly:

*Even though she was the youngest, Sarah was the smartest of all her sisters.*

**Indirect characterization** The author *shows* the character in action and lets readers make their own interpretations:

*At report card time, Sarah was the only daughter in the Thompson family who always brought home straight A's.*

**Authors' characterization tools** Authors use many clues to communicate characters to their readers, including:

The character's name	What the character's home and surroundings are like
The character's physical appearance	The character's habits and actions
How the character is dressed	What other characters say about him or her
The character's occupation	

## QUESTIONS TO ASK WHILE YOU ARE READING A SHORT STORY:

1. Have you looked at each character from different angles? Do you understand their values, feelings, goals, and problems?
2. How does the author make use of both direct and indirect characterization to portray character? What specific characterization clues are given?